

Chapter 3

From Trepidation to a First Draft

Abstract Many academic authors are hobbled by the fear that they will invest considerable effort in writing only to have it rejected. When expectations are low, motivation to persist at a task drops off and avoidance is a common response. This chapter begins with the primary source of academic writing's excellence; namely, creativity. Across the disciplines and throughout the world, originality is a highly valued attribute in scholarly writing. This chapter first coaches aspiring and experienced authors in strategies to generate ideas for a manuscript. Next, it offers advice on identifying suitable outlets and getting feedback on writing before it is subjected to formal review. This chapter offers examples of manuscript revision and appropriate responses to manuscript rejection. The chapter is replete with activities that support authors in becoming more productive.

For 30 years, I taught a doctoral seminar called Writing for Professional Publication. In 1994, I posted a copy of my favorite *Chronicle of Higher Education* cartoon by Vivian Scott Hixson on my bulletin board. It pictures a young student seated across the desk from a haggard, matronly professor. The bright-eyed newcomer inquires, "Do you think I'll ever be a *beautiful* writer, like you?" Although the cartoon supplied no answers, my customary answer is "It depends." The reason that this fundamental question of aspiring authors cannot be answered easily is that academic authorship is more than a wish or a toolkit. Contributing high-quality writing to your field involves complex understandings about scholarly discourse, writing genres, expectations of peers, personal/professional identity, and dedication to the craft. This chapter begins with what we see as foundational to academic authorship: flexible, fluent, original, and effective thinking or creativity. From there, we address major concerns of authors, including: identifying and narrowing a topic, locating suitable outlets, generating a first draft, seeking feedback from others, and coping with rejection.

Creativity and Authorship

In William Golding's (1974) classic essay, "Thinking as a Hobby", he describes thinkers at the lowest level thinkers as those who "warm their hands at the fires of their prejudices" (p. 10). Thinkers at the middle level as those who are immobilized by indecision and are in suspended animation, waiting for someone to provide the answers. Thinkers at the highest level as those who are willing to strike out in new directions, work at the edge of their competence, and risk disapproval by forging an idea that is uniquely their own. In most conceptualizations of human thought, creativity is the pinnacle (Anderson, Krathwohl, & Bloom, 2001).

The theoretical foundation for this book is the triarchic theory of intelligence (Sternberg, 1985, 1988) that includes three components: (1) the *creative abilities* to generate ideas, (2) the *analytical abilities* to decide which ideas to pursue, and (3) the *practical abilities* to implement ideas and persuade others of their value. Scholars' success with writing for professional publication relies on all three types of intelligence as illustrated in the graphic below (Fig. 3.1).

Activity 3.1: Creativity and Authorship

Apply the triarchic theory of intelligence (Sternberg, 1985) to appraise your strength in each area.

1. *Creative*. Are you fluent, meaning that you generate many ideas for projects? Do your colleagues regard you as "an idea person"?
2. *Analytic*. Do your colleagues see you as a problem-solver who follows through with ideas?
3. *Practical*. Are you capable of influencing others and persuading them of the value of your ideas?

Based on many years of working with students and faculty as they write for publication, five of the most frequently asked questions are:

How do authors get good ideas for manuscripts?

What is a recommended way to identify suitable publishing outlets?

How do I generate a first draft?

Who can lend support as I strive to get published?

If my manuscript was rejected, should I give up or persist?

The remainder of this chapter will address each of these concerns as a way to get things started.

Identifying and Narrowing a Topic

Many times, writers are discouraged by thinking that they have no right to discuss a topic until they are recognized as leading experts in the field. Instead of bemoaning what you cannot do at the moment, think about what it would be possible to do with a concerted effort. A practicing professional who studies the literature may be

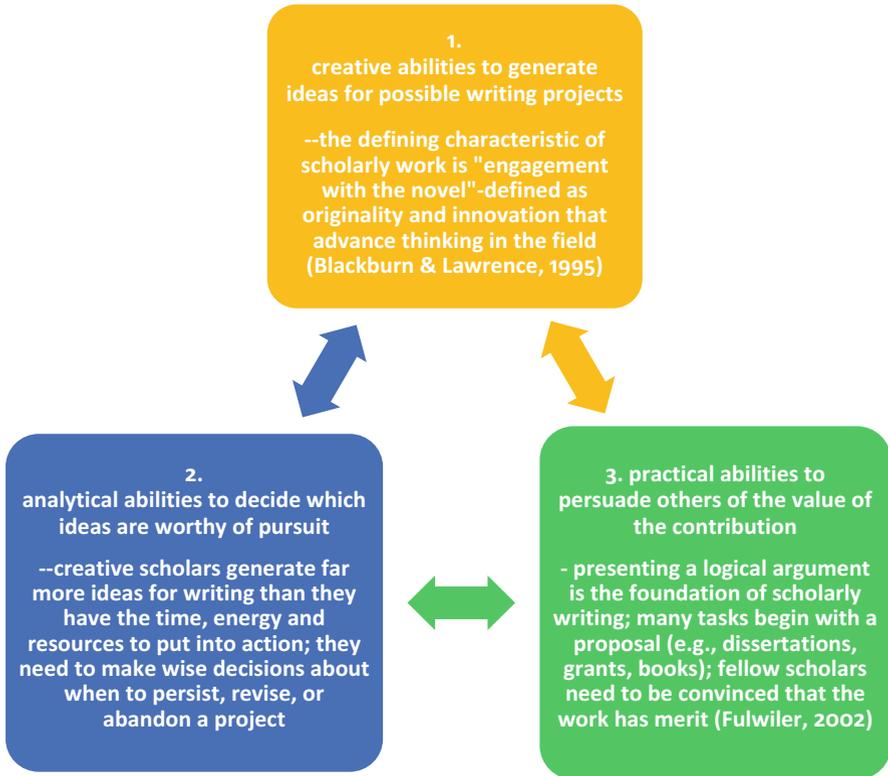


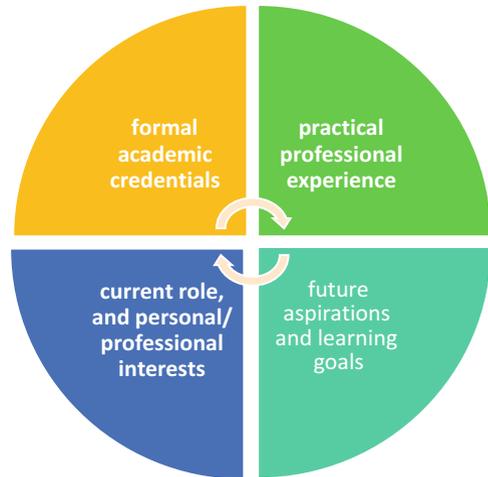
Fig. 3.1 Sternberg’s triarchic theory of intelligence as it applies to scholarly writing

uniquely qualified to explain the “real world” implications of that research to fellow practitioners. In fact, you may be much better suited to do this than the leading theorist or researcher who may be somewhat distanced from the daily concerns of practitioners.

A place to begin is by reflecting on your strengths. As you decide about topics, some things to consider are (1) relevance (your level of interest), (2) capability (your skill set), and (3) marketability (can this topic lead to a published manuscript?) (Skolits, Brockett, & Hiemstra, 2011). Use Fig. 3.2 to highlight your educational attainment, work experience, current role and interests, and your future aspirations. Usually, something that fits the intersection of the four is a particularly fertile area for generating ideas for scholarly writing projects. If you have published previously, try working backwards to see if the project reflected these strengths. Perhaps, if you abandoned the project, it was a “goodness of fit” issue.

Many times, beginning writers assume that they should choose a “hot topic” that is being discussed in the literature. Or, they may wonder if it is advisable to wade into a persistent controversy and disagree with a leader in the field as a shortcut to

Fig. 3.2 Identifying topics for writing



establishing their reputations. Neither of these approaches has much to recommend them. Where the hot topic is concerned, the pace at which writing moves from conceptualization to publication is slow—a book, for example, typically takes 2 or 3 years. By that time, the issue may be tepid or cold. Where the controversy is concerned, authors run the risk of “going unarmed into a battle of wits” because, chances are, a leader in the field has an enviable depth of understanding and facility with debate. Rather than hoping for fame and fortune, aim to make a contribution to your field. To illustrate, Rae Ann Hirsh decided to write about the role of emotions in learning and, for her dissertation study, she observed children who had been identified as having serious reading problems. Based on that shared interest, her advisor invited her to co-author an editorial (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2009) and, based on the success of that writing project, they wrote a book chapter together for an edited book (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2012). Some strategies for identifying topics are in Activity 3.2.

Activity 3.2: Generating Ideas for Manuscripts

Scan the professional journals, book publishers’ catalogs, and publishers’ web sites. For example, there may be a call for papers for a thematic issue published in the journal or an invitation to submit chapters for an edited volume. Authors are sometimes disappointed to discover that something very similar to the article or book they had in mind has been published already. Rather than giving up, think of a different focus.

Attend meetings, professional conferences, talk and listen. Participating in meetings helps to identify topics that are on the minds of fellow professionals. The trends, issues, controversies, and questions discussed can suggest a topic or a focus.

Collaborate with others. Do a Google search of professors and colleagues to see their curriculum vitae and determine if you have shared interests. Faculty members often welcome the opportunity to collaborate with exemplary practitioners and graduate students who are serious scholars.

When first discussing writing topics, it is commonplace for authors to identify broad domains of interest, for instance: college student retention, ethics in nursing, or leadership qualities in higher education administrators. Each one of these topics could be a book or even an encyclopedia. How, then, can the topic be narrowed to make it more manageable? There are several basic ways in Activity 3.3.

Activity 3.3: How to Narrow a Topic

As you read each invented article title below, try “playing with titles” for your manuscript. Strive to make your focus more specific from the very beginning. Some ways to do this include:

By audience—for example, “Presenting Research at a Professional Conference: A Guide for Nurse Practitioners”.

By purpose—for example, “Increasing Retention of College Freshmen: The Role of Peer Tutors in Learning Support Programs”

By strategy—for example, “Using Mind Mapping to Draft a Practical Journal Article in Counseling”

By time—for example, “Research Trends in Bullying Prevention and Interventions, 2005–2015”

By participants—for example, “Sociology Alumni and Satisfaction with Graduate Degree Programs: A National Survey”.

By a unifying feature—for example, “Common Characteristics of Effective Pre-Engineering Programs: A Review of the Literature.”

Note that a colon often is used in the title. This is not just an affectation; it often makes it possible to include more information without adding too many articles, prepositions and other words. Remember that the APA Guide specifies that a title should not exceed 12 words.

Another strategy for narrowing the topic is to identify a suitable outlet early in the process of manuscript development.

Locating Suitable Outlets

The publication of empirical research in a short list of top-tier, peer-reviewed journals is not the only type of scholarly writing that has value. What “counts” as writing at one institution will be dismissed as inconsequential at another. Therefore, each scholar needs to closely analyze expectations for scholarship within his or her workplace. For example, “Research universities require that faculty publish their research in high-impact media, such as SSCI indexed journals or A-rated journals. Often, research has to be empirical to count towards tenure and promotion” (Wang, 2015, p. xxiv). For writers from other types of institutions, expectations may be less clear—and, they may change considerably over the course of a career.

Where promoting professional development is the goal, writing something well is better than writing nothing at all, because it demonstrates effort and builds skills. What is published today in a modest outlet can support success tomorrow in a more

competitive outlet. For example, a doctoral candidate and high school mathematics teacher wrote a brief account of a strategy for teaching probability to students that was published her professional association's newsletter. Afterwards, the editor of the organization's state journal invited her to write a full-length article on the topic. This too was accepted for publication. Well-written pieces have a way of attracting positive attention and sometimes lead to additional opportunities. It is always encouraging to see that someone else has found your work helpful or to see it cited in another published source.

Authors often are surprised when they are advised to identify outlets in advance of completing the manuscript. However, when groups of journal editors get together, they compare notes and guesstimate that about 20–30% of what is submitted to their publications is inappropriate for the outlet; these manuscripts are rejected with a form letter and not even sent out for review. Why? Because they are the equivalent of a telephone call that is a “wrong number” and are disconnected as quickly as possible. Authors can significantly increase their chances of acceptance by thoroughly investigating the intended outlets and writing for that specific audience from the beginning. This is much more efficient than preparing the entire work and then searching for publisher. In fact, this is one reason that book publishers do not ask for the entire book before they offer a contract; rather, they typically request two or three sample chapters so that the manuscript can be developed along the lines that will make it most marketable. When a manuscript is a mismatch for an outlet, it is rejected without review. If this happens, the author probably has waited for several weeks, only to get a disappointing result and no direction about ways to improve the work. If, however, the author knows the outlet/audience, studies the guidelines for submission, and prepares the work accordingly, chances for getting a “revise and resubmit” rather than an outright rejection increase considerably. Table 3.1 suggests strategies for analyzing outlets.

Whatever you decide to write, ask yourself these questions about places where your manuscript might be published:

- Who is my audience?
- What is my focus?
- Why bring this information and audience together at this time?
- How will publication in this outlet help me to accomplish my goals?

Generating a First Draft

A prolific college textbook author was asked how she tackled the task of writing an undergraduate textbook on the topic of human development. “It all starts my basement,” she laughed, “with an old dining room table. I start making one pile for each main topic in the book—my teaching notes, class activities and students' responses (with signed permission forms to use them), explanations of assignments with scoring rubrics, copies of articles, other textbooks marked with post-it notes, scholarly books—even photographs and newspaper articles. I talk myself into going to

Table 3.1 How to analyze outlets

<i>What is the purpose of the publication?</i>
Read the mission statement of the publisher, the “about...” or history section on the homepage. Many publications have a masthead. This word originally referred to the front of the ship that determines the direction of the journey. The masthead for a journal also provides direction; it can be stated as a motto. For example, <i>Childhood Education</i> , published by the Association for Childhood Education International’s masthead reads:
<i>Bright futures for every child, every nation</i>
<i>Childhood Education</i> , the award-winning, bimonthly journal of the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI), focuses on the learning and well-being of children around the world. Each issue includes articles highlighting various perspectives on innovative classroom practices from around the world; cutting-edge concepts for education delivery; innovative schooling models; child growth and development theory; timely and vital issues affecting education, children, and their families; and research reviews. The journal’s editorial intent is to include a wide distribution of articles from varied countries, and from advocacy- and policy-oriented organizations as well as academic institutions
<i>Who evaluates the manuscripts?</i>
Look at the personnel, variously referred to as the Staff, Editorial Board, Advisory Board, or Publications Committee. What are their institutional affiliations, and roles? Are they practitioners in the field or international researchers, for example?
<i>What types of manuscripts will they consider?</i>
Search online by the journal’s title or the publishing company’s name and read the guidelines for authors. If a journal has regular departments or features, who writes them? For example, do they publish book or media reviews? Are they written by staff members, a Department editor, or do different individuals contribute them? If it is a book publisher, look at their catalog. What are their areas of specialization? Might they be branching out and seeking manuscripts in a different area? Check the publishers’ displays at professional conferences and chat with their sales representatives or acquisitions editor to learn more. Look for one-page “calls for papers” printed in the journals, posted on bulletin boards at conferences, or distributed at the publisher’s booths
<i>What topics have been recently published?</i>
If it is a scholarly book publisher, look for new publications in their catalog or online. For journals, browse through the tables of contents over the past couple of years. Are some or all of the issues thematic (focused on the same topic) or are they multi-topic issues? Is the same individual the editor for every issue, or do they have guest edited issues? Do they have an editorial calendar with copy deadlines for issues or do they review manuscripts at any time?
<i>What writing style and format is preferred?</i>
Examine the formality of the writing in the pieces that are published. What writing techniques, structure, and organization do authors employ? How do the authors make use of headings, figures, tables, charts, and graphs? What is the typical length of the books or articles that this group publishes? Some indicators that the writing is less formal are the use of personal experiences or anecdotes, the personal pronoun I, and photos or advertising in the publication
<i>Which of their publications have been particularly successful?</i>
Refer to the publisher’s website. What were the journal’s top downloaded articles? Which of their articles have earned awards? If it is a scholarly book publisher, search the web or catalog to read comments about their books. The top books often are in the first few pages of the catalog. Which ones have been recognized with awards or earned positive reviews? If it is a college-level textbook publisher, which books have survived beyond a first edition?
<i>What are the submission policies?</i>
Locate the submission guidelines for authors. What referencing style is required? What is the page or word limit for journals or the preferred manuscript length for book publishers? How are manuscripts submitted and to whom?

that table by telling myself I'm just browsing, sorting or taking notes but this usually leads to writing something because I don't want to forget anything. The next thing I know, I've been writing for an hour or two."

This approach is consistent with writing experts' advice to engage in freewriting, defined as writing without attempting to edit at the same time. Freewriting is similar to brainstorming during a discussion; the goal is to generate ideas, not to evaluate them. Through freewriting, you can undo "the ingrained habit of editing at the same time you are trying to produce." (Elbow, 1973, p. 6)—but you'll need to write quickly because you have quite a bit of "writing baggage" to jettison before you begin. Start writing immediately and write quickly before these suitcases clog up the carousel of ideas in your mind. Some ways to begin writing immediately are described in Fig. 3.3.

One underrated building block for generating a first draft is the ordinary paragraph. Although this structure is taught many times across a school career, many authors do not follow even the most basic structure for a paragraph. They may, for example, emulate the style that they see in novels or the newspaper and write a one-sentence paragraph followed by a paragraph that is nearly two pages long. If the building blocks are flawed in this way, it weakens the foundation of your argument. After you have written some pages, go back through and look at each paragraph. Assess each paragraph with the following questions:

- Does it begin with a topic sentence that sets expectations for what is to follow?
- Does the middle of the paragraph make an assertion and support it with evidence from authoritative sources?
- Does the paragraph conclude by "wrapping up" the topic and transitioning to the next idea?

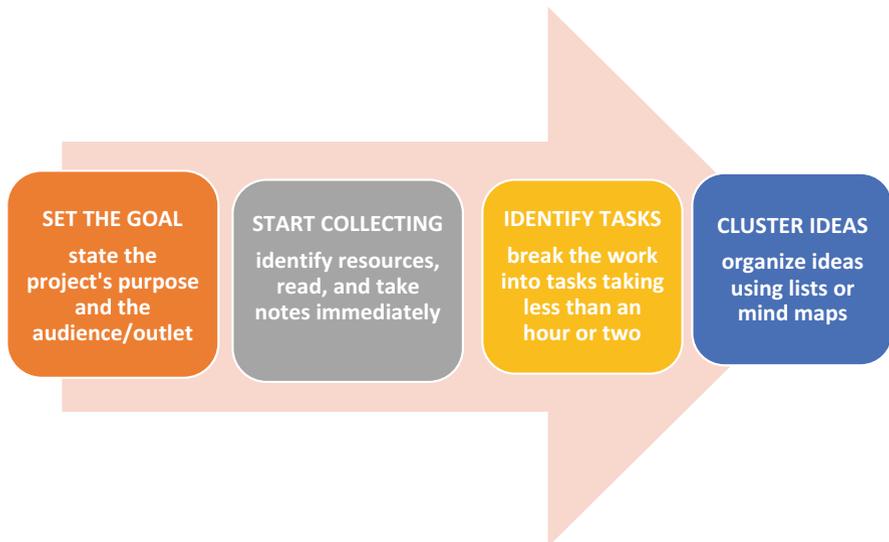


Fig. 3.3 Quickly launching a writing project (Adapted from Stichler & Nielsen, 2014)

Below is an example of a solid paragraph that demonstrates this structure as well as the “assert, then support” style of scholarly writing; the topic is reading readiness. Note how it explains terminology, begins more generally and gradually narrows to the point/thesis, and uses an “assert then support” style:

The preschool period is a time when the environment in which children develop can contribute to large differences in language and literacy skills. Before children can actually read, they generally acquire some sense of the purposes and mechanics of the reading enterprise. For some children, opportunities to learn about reading are many, and for others, they are few (McCormick & Mason, 1986). Those who can identify letters and are familiar with the purpose of print are considered ‘reading ready’ (National Research Council, 1998). Reading readiness at school entry is highly correlated with reading ability in the primary grades (Hammill & McNutt, 1980; Scarborough, 1998). The National Center for Education Statistics recently published the results of a survey of America’s kindergarten class of 1998–1999 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). The survey recorded the number of first-time-to-kindergarten children with literacy skills that are prerequisites to learning to read: knowing that print reads right to left, knowing where to go when a line of print ends, and knowing where the story ends. The results: 37 percent of first-time kindergartners could do all three of these skills, but 18 percent could do none of the three. As they enter kindergarten, 66 percent of children recognize their letters, 29 percent recognize beginning sounds in words, and 17 percent recognize ending sounds (National Research Council, Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy, 2001, p. 65).

Even those responsible for teaching writing sometimes fail to follow their own advice. One doctoral student noted that, even though he told his undergraduates to follow the paragraph guidelines at the Purdue OWL site (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/606/01/>) he did not do this consistently in his own writing.

Seeking Feedback from Others

There are several points during the development of a manuscript when it is important to get feedback from peers, colleagues, and individuals with experience as reviewers and editors. Figure 3.4 guides authors through the process of inviting others to critique their work.

Why Manuscripts Are Rejected

One of the burning questions related to publication is “Why are manuscripts rejected?” or, more specifically, “Why was *my* manuscript rejected?” The reasons for manuscript rejection are varied. Some of the most common include:

- Lack of familiarity with the audience. This is the leading reason for manuscript rejection. For example, an author sent a research article about psycholinguistics with a very complex statistical analysis and excessive jargon to a publication that is mainly for practitioners—definitely a mismatch between manuscript and readership.

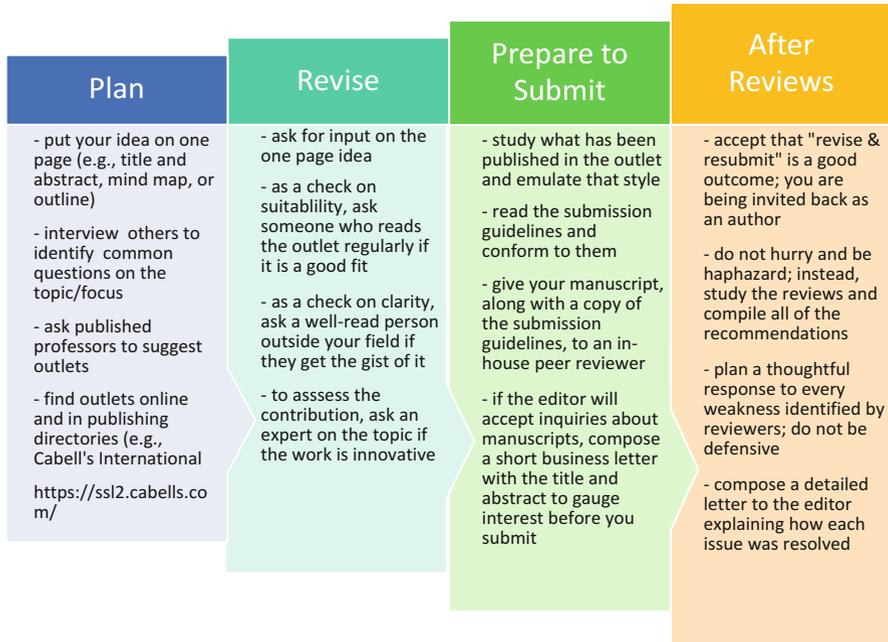


Fig. 3.4 Soliciting feedback from others on manuscripts

- Failure to investigate the outlet. Authors sometimes submit manuscripts without ever looking at the articles that have been published in the journal previously in terms of content, writing style, and format. If, for example, the journal just devoted an entire issue to the topic of the author's paper then it is unlikely that the editor will want to devote even more journal space to that subject.
- Resistance to recommendations for revision. The writing needs to be readable and present a logical progression of ideas. Some authors operate under the misconception that the brilliance of their ideas will compensate for poorly written prose.
- Disregard for submission guidelines. If the journal sets a page limit of 25, 12-point print pages with everything double spaced, some authors will submit a manuscript in 10-point print with some sections single spaced in the hope that no one will notice. Other format requirements, such as supplying an abstract and key words for indexing purposes often are overlooked. Even if a manuscript is deemed worthy of publication, every time that authors ignore submission guidelines, it slows down the process. In fact, one editor of a journal with an almost 2-year lag time between acceptance and publication of articles sent out a letter to the authors indicating that articles prepared in accordance with the guidelines would be moved to the head of the line.

- **Insufficient originality/contribution.** Reviewers and editors hope to see manuscripts that advance the professional conversation rather than reiterate ideas that are widely understood and available elsewhere in the literature. Although there are timeless messages that bear re-examination, even these manuscripts are expected to demonstrate originality by taking a fresh perspective or attaining a high level of synthesis/evaluation. For example, one editor had received several manuscripts about the “obesity epidemic” in the United States, each of them citing statistics and discussing the problem. It was not until a manuscript that described the characteristics of effective interventions was submitted that it earned acceptance from the editor and reviewers.
- **Numerous errors.** These can range from major conceptual flaws or errors of fact, to grammatical or spelling errors. Each mistake becomes a demerit as peers review the work. Editors sometimes admit to a “three strikes and you’re out” approach because careless errors reflect unfavorably on the author’s scholarship and call into question other issues related to accuracy and attention to detail.
- **Misunderstanding of the editor’s and reviewers’ roles.** Editors and reviewers are gatekeepers in the sense that they make judgments about the quality of each manuscript. When the anonymous peer review system works well, they assess the work that is in front of them without other identifying information about the authors. They function as experts, representatives of the publication, and advocates for the readers. It is not their job to assist faculty who are desperate to get published; rather, their job is to decide whether or not what was submitted is publishable or nearly publishable. For example, a team of international authors, when given the opportunity to revise and resubmit, accused the editor of “educational imperialism.” Yet if these same authors were reviewers of manuscripts submitted to a journal printed in their first language, they would no doubt expect it to be well written and free of errors, even if the authors were writing in their second language. There can be no double standard when it comes to peer review.

The reasons for manuscript rejection are varied (see Table 3.2).

Online Tool Refer the American Psychological Association’s “Learning APA Style” for free tutorials, examples, and answers to many questions about scholarly writing such as bias-free language, grammar, ethics, the use of headings, how to prepare tables/figures, and more at <http://apastyle.org/learn/>

Coping with Rejection

No author relishes receiving a letter that begins “We regret to inform you...” The first step in dealing with rejection is to use it to analyze your writing rather than to criticize yourself. A rejection is not: a personal attack, definitive evidence of editor

Table 3.2 Common reasons for manuscript rejection

<i>The submission is not within the journal's scope</i> ; for example, a practical article is submitted to a journal that publishes empirical research only
<i>The manuscript obviously was written for another purpose</i> ; for example, as a report to the funder for a grant, as a thesis or dissertation, or an in-house "white paper" for a particular university
<i>The material is a rehash of what is widely understood</i> ; in other words, it does not offer anything new, advance thinking, or make a contribution to in the field
<i>The type of manuscript is not sought</i> ; for example, the manuscript is written as an editorial when only the editor writes them
<i>The manuscript is not a distinct manuscript type</i> (i.e., theoretical, practical, research) and instead is a confusing mixture; for example, a practical article has been written as if it were original research
<i>The writing is not of publishable quality</i> (i.e., poorly organized, poorly written, not prepared in the required referencing style); the revisions required are substantive and would demand too much of the editors' and reviewers' time
<i>The manuscript includes major errors</i> ; for example, the names of leaders in the field are misspelled, study findings are misinterpreted in the literature review, or guidelines for the ethical treatment of human subjects are in question
<i>The manuscript has many minor errors</i> (i.e., syntax, punctuation, spelling) but they are so numerous that they call into question the author's credibility
<i>The manuscript does not conform to the format guidelines</i> and the manuscript is prepared in the wrong referencing style (i.e., APA Style instead of Chicago Style or APA 5th Edition rather than APA 6th edition)

bias, or verification that you were, indeed, an imposter all along. Authors can be hypersensitive, particularly at first. An established author remembered getting:

very, very negative and somewhat hostile responses from the reviewers. That's the way I think I viewed it at the time, I actually should go back and probably see if that was really was the case or if I was just incredibly sensitive about it... and what happened was I never resubmitted it. It was a 'revise and resubmit,' but I felt overwhelmed and I felt like I couldn't do anything about it. But I think one of the things that I have learned from that is that you know what, don't let that happen... put things away for a little bit and come back to them. And then try...to go point by point through the reviewers' responses and try to take a chance at those things versus saying you can't do this. (Jalongo, 2013b, p. 76)

The first piece of advice concerning rejection is to try to avoid it. Perhaps the simplest preventative method is to resist the impulse to send it in too soon. What often happens is that scholars feel pressured to get something published and submit a manuscript well before it is a polished, finished project. Authors—particularly those with less experience—need the input of a known audience before they subject a manuscript to an unknown audience. Finding the right people to do this is essential. A manuscript is not improved when someone offers uncritical acceptance of the work. You will need a person who is knowledgeable, candid, respectful, and provides constructive criticism. As professor emeritus of SUNY Buffalo, Jim Hoot, is fond of saying, "Think of criticism as a kindness." People who can provide constructive criticism are a treasure and, after you find a few you can rely on and learn from, you can reciprocate by helping others.

If it is too late and your work has been rejected already, what should you do? Although it is easier said than done, learn to treat manuscript rejections as a way to begin the process of revision. Each time you learn something about yourself as a writer and how to navigate the world of academic writing. Some strategies that can help you to cope with rejection follow.

1. Move on. Set a timer and be hurt or angry for five minutes, then use those strong feelings to fuel your positive response. Resist the temptation to bury your work in that mausoleum of rejected manuscripts, the bottom file drawer. Rejection does not mean that your work is irredeemable and unpublishable forever, nor does it mean that all of your time has been wasted. One author had a manuscript rejected twice—mainly because she did not understand the outlets sufficiently well. After revising a third time, she submitted the work to the state-level journal of the most respected organization in her field, received very positive reviews, and finally succeeded in publishing the work.
2. Make sure you understand the decision. Has the editor given you any encouragement or is this an outright rejection? Make certain that you know whether a resubmission will be considered and, if so, if the manuscript has to go through a full review again. If you received a form letter (e.g., “We wish you success in finding an alternative place of publication for your work”), then the door is shut. Identify another publication with the right audience.

If the rejection was a form letter ask a trustworthy, successful writer to look at the intended outlet and your manuscript and try to determine what might have gone wrong. If you were lucky enough to get detailed feedback from several reviewers, spread out the reviews and make a chart that summarizes the recommendations. Then make a plan for systematically addressing each one before trying again.

3. Resist the urge to contact the editor. Appeal to the editor only if an error was made (e.g., you received the wrong review). This is not the time to call and argue, ask for another chance, send an irate e-mail, or beg to have something published. So much time goes into editorial decisions that it is rare to get a reversal. Authors sometimes make the mistake of thinking that editors are obligated to make revisions for them or interpret the reviews for them. For example, two of the three reviewers might mention that an article is too long and the author will contact the editor to inquire how, exactly, to condense the work. This is the author’s responsibility. Others cannot decide for you what is most essential because you are the one held accountable for the work.
4. Rethink the audience or outlet. If the reason for rejection is that the topic has already been addressed extensively in a field, consider changing your audience. You may find that one efficient way to do this is to collaborate with a colleague from another field where these ideas are not as widely understood. For example, an author in Information and Communications Technology was not successful in getting an article on electronic portfolios accepted at first; however, when he collaborated with a colleague from Vocational Education and the concept was presented to that audience, the material was regarded as more innovative and the

manuscript was published. Align yourself with others who are engaged in multiple writing projects and who would be willing to invest in a reclamation project with a rejected manuscript. Ask another writer to help you find a home for the manuscript. What may not have worked as a journal article might work very well as a book chapter, and vice versa.

5. Repurpose the work. If all publication efforts fail, put your work to another use—a conference presentation, a guest lecture in a class, an electronic publication, an ERIC document, an association publication, and so forth. Even if you cannot use the entire work, rip it apart and put it to another use. Perhaps you attempted to write about a broad topic in a short format and that prevented you from being sufficiently thorough. If this is the case, you may want to think about a monograph or book instead of an article. If you now suspect that your idea was too parochial for a national audience, reframe the project for a state or regional audience. Sometimes, editors recognize the potential in a manuscript even if they are not interested in publishing it. If an editor happens to recommend an alternative outlet, be certain to investigate it as a possible place of publication. The commercial publisher Springer Nature, for example, publishes hundreds of scholarly journals. They have a service called *SpringerPlus*. If an editor receives a manuscript with merit that is not a good match for their journal, they can transfer it to this site and other editors who are seeking manuscripts can contact the author if they are interested in publishing it.
6. Revisit the work later. Respond to criticism but don't allow it to shatter your faith in your work. Let the manuscript sit for a little while and allow the sting of rejection to subside a bit. If the work was rejected with a form letter, try to figure out what might have gone wrong—was it a poor match with the outlet? Badly timed? If the work was reviewed, read the reviews more dispassionately this time. Can you see now what you could not see before? Many times, authors realize that what was recommended is not all that formidable. It probably would be less time-consuming to make revisions than to start all over again with a different publication or to abandon the work entirely. Even if the changes requested will require a major investment of time, ask the editor for an extension and make sure that you address each point adequately. Ask a trusted, published colleague to go over the reviews with you to help you arrive at an approach to revising the work. As an absolute last resort, move on to other projects that are more interesting and show greater potential for publication. Activity 3.4 highlights the changes that authors need to make.

Activity 3.4: Key Transitions for Writers

In his study of professors' writing habits, Boice (1995) identified seven habits associated with scholarly productivity. Rate yourself by responding to each question below. Do you:

1. prepare thoroughly and work patiently?
2. write daily instead of in binges?
3. set manageable writing tasks that can be completed in smaller chunks of time?

4. know when to quit and return the next day?
5. switch to related tasks when the writing seems blocked?
6. find ways to simulate the reading audience for the outlet?
7. analyze personal work habits and strive to build resilience?

Getting the Writing Started

We recommend starting with something very concise—a one-page overview. That one page could be a mind map, an outline, or an abstract that encapsulates your ideas. The reasoning behind this is that, unlike a full-length manuscript, the time invested is not that great for the author or for the reviewer. If you get feedback early on a project before the manuscript is fully developed, it is easier to make substantive changes as needed. To illustrate, some of the perennial topics proposed by academic authors are such things as arguing that some people are resistant to new technologies, that professionals need to be more reflective, or that the campus culture affects students. While all of these subjects have merit, authors will be challenged to make these very familiar topics new in some way. Such topics have been visited and revisited many times, so it would be counterproductive to attempt yet another general treatment of the topic. Activity 3.5 guides authors and peer reviewers through the process of reviewing an idea for a manuscript.

Activity 3.5: Peer Review Guidelines for a Manuscript Idea

Provide the reviewer with a specific title for the manuscript. Supply a one-page overview of the work. Search the web and publishing directories (usually housed in the reference section of the library) to identify an outlet suited to your level of experience where your work has a reasonable chance of success. In other words, do not begin with the premier journal in your field unless you have already published in less competitive outlets.

Author Submits

1. General topic and the particular facet of that topic that will be addressed
2. Audience and intended outlet—copy of guidelines for authors with key information highlighted
3. An answer to this question: Why bring this information and this audience together? Use relevant citations from the literature need to support each assertion—four to six should be sufficient.
4. A series of audience-centered questions that will be addressed in the manuscript, arranged in a logical sequence
5. A clear, concise title (fewer than 12 words) that accurately represents the manuscript's topic, focus, and audience

Peer Reviewer Questions

1. Is the topic interesting? Has the author identified a focus that narrows the topic sufficiently to treat it in the type of manuscript proposed (i.e., article, book chapter, monograph, book)?
2. Is there a definite match between the audience and outlet? Did the author provide a copy of the outlet's submission guidelines and highlight the relevant information?
3. Has the author persuaded you that this information is important and of value for the readership of the publication?
4. Look at the questions to be answered by the manuscript. Do they reflect the audience's perspective? Are there any questions that you still have as a reviewer of this work? Are there some sources that you would recommend to the author?
5. Does the title effectively convey the topic, focus and audience? Is it concise and clear?

The strategy of writing just one page can be helpful to writers of dissertations as well. Table 3.3 is a brief practical article that was written for a free online newsletter called *The All-But-Dissertation Survival Guide*. The purpose of the newsletter is to provide practical coaching to doctoral candidates who are stalled at the dissertation stage.

Just as successful students figure out what professors and dissertation committees expect, authors who are successful at publishing know what editors want (Benson & Silver, 2013). Table 3.4 offers some suggestions on fashioning a manuscript that is more likely to earn acceptance from reviewers and editors.

Activity 3.6: Interview with a Published Author

Identify a colleague who has successfully published a manuscript recently. Interview the author in person, by telephone, or online with questions such as: How did you get the idea for this work? Did you collaborate with others? What process did you use to choose an outlet? What were the most challenging aspects of getting it published? What surprised you the most? In future, will you pursue this topic further or move in a different direction? Is there any advice you can offer to others seeking to publish?

How do we learn as authors and get smarter about achieving success with a manuscript? One very important way is to confront your fears and dreams, head on. For example, think about the worst/best scenarios. Suppose you are writing a grant. What's the worst thing that can happen? It's probably some version of "I don't get the grant, I need to find another funding source, or I repurpose this work to achieve a different goal." What's the best thing that can happen? "I get the grant, but it's a ton of extra work and there's no release time attached; however, it may earn me a sabbatical leave when I'm ready to publish the research." Confronting the worst outcomes and envisioning the best ones helps to let go of the self-doubt lurking in the background. Still, you need to protect yourself from becoming completely demoralized by failure or burned out by boredom. A balance of comparatively low risk of failure and high risk of failure ventures helps to counteract this. Every scholar

Table 3.3 Getting the writing going: Advice to authors of dissertations

No matter how brilliant your research idea and no matter how supportive your committee, at some point, you'll have to generate reams of text in the process of producing a dissertation

That fact can give pause to the most confident writers, daunt those who have any doubts, and immobilize those who feel that writing is their nemesis. What can help you to get moving with writing a dissertation? First, try not to dwell on the magnitude of what has to be accomplished. Promise yourself that you'll do just one thing. What follows are three steps you can take to counteract writer's block

1. Write one page. Instead of wallowing in words with your stomach churning, try distilling the essence of your dissertation onto a single page. The one-pager consists of four bulleted lists that answer the following questions:

(a) Purpose: Why conduct this study at this time? What gaps might it fill? What contributions might it make?

(b) Literature Review: What is already known related to the study purpose? What theories and research are pertinent?

(c) Research Questions: What do I really want to know? How I can state this in answerable questions?

(d) Methodology: What types of data will be necessary to answer each question? What methods suit the data?

Gradually, all of the pieces are brought into alignment: the areas of the literature review are connected to research questions, and both the literature review and the research questions are matched to the methodology. This deceptively simple activity addresses a common deterrent to writing: anxiety about the time sink of spewing out page after page of text that eventually ends up in the recycle bin

The one-pager also enables you to visualize connections between and among the pieces of the entire dissertation and helps to avoid writing in circles, overwhelmed by the inevitable information overload. It's the same mapping approach used by novelists who keep a plot diagram up on the wall to guide their efforts. You are, in effect, sketching out the story for your dissertation

Another advantage of just one page is that you can share it with several others before you invest too much time, or impose too much on theirs. Additionally, you can tinker with the bulleted lists and refine your logic before you settle down to write

2. Write some more. After the one-page exercise, use a graduated challenge approach and begin generating portions of documents. Put each task, however small, on your list of things to do. It might be something relatively simple, such as filling out the cover sheet for the Institutional Review Board proposal. Then it is on to new writing demands, such as pieces of the proposal followed by the dissertation itself, one chapter at a time

In my experience, it is the least successful doctoral advisees who are forever promising that they are going to surprise the chairperson by delivering the entire dissertation to his or her door someday, as if it were a gift. They resist the strong suggestion that submitting one chapter at a time is preferable so that they can get committee feedback along the way

They go for long spells without producing any writing, panic when deadlines loom large, and binge write in response to stress. Although Hollywood depictions of famous authors tend to glamorize binge writing, awaiting the visitation of your Muse has little to do with the data-driven writing produced by scholars that relies on steady, incremental improvements

Long periods of inattention to a dissertation are as deadly to degrees as they are to home maintenance: pretty soon you have a dilapidated structure in danger of collapse. On the other hand, if you invest in the upkeep, both dissertations and houses can stand

(continued)

Table 3.3 (continued)

3. Expect to rewrite. Many doctoral students get derailed by the first whiff of criticism of their work and set the dissertation aside, assuming that the committee didn't "like" it. Ironically, part of the problem for ABDs is that they are good students who have, for many years, turned in papers and earned good grades. The dissertation contradicts that prior experience

Begin by abandoning all hopeful dreams about your brilliant words flowing effortlessly from mind to fingertips to keyboard to screen to paper. Abandon also the wishful thinking that your committee will respond to your writing efforts by begging you not to change a word. Distinguished scholars report numerous rewrites and seek colleagues' criticism of a manuscript before submitting it for publication. Even after all of this, reviewers and editors usually require additional revisions before the work is published. A dissertation is intended to simulate that experience. In fact, one of the dissertation's important, yet frequently overlooked, goals is to socialize you into the peer review process that is used to write scholarly articles and books and to secure grant funding

Conclusion. Obstacles to writing are like cleaning up a messy garage. You can keep opening the door and slamming it shut, saying, "Oooh, I don't want to go in there. It looks like too much work." You can leave it a mess, stumble around, and make excuses for it. You can block out time for a cleaning marathon on your calendar and find so many compelling reasons to reschedule. Or, you can convince yourself to go in and do just one thing, such as clear a space in which your car can fit

If you accomplish just one thing, you'll probably be encouraged by the success of the small step and stick with it a bit more than you originally anticipated. Even if you do decide to stop there for the day, your next visit won't be quite so onerous. Likewise, if you accomplish just one small dissertation-related task every few days, you'll soon accumulate a body of work. This is the surest way to gain some control over the writing process and write your way out of that doctoral degree limbo called the ABD.

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has some tasks that he or she feels confident in pursuing while other tasks are somewhat more or much more difficult. If you never venture beyond the things that you already do well, such as teaching a particular course or making presentations at the state-level conference, there is no opportunity to push the boundaries and grow professionally. On the other hand, if you choose only those tasks that represent a very high risk of failure and many of them do not work out, your confidence could erode. You have to take care of yourself by making a conscious effort to balance risks and rewards. You also need to approach writing, not as a miserable undertaking but as a way to help you become a clearer, better thinker. Activity 3.7 suggests some ways to accomplish this.

Activity 3.7: Writing as Learning

There are at least six basic mechanisms for getting smarter gleaned from neuroscience (Jensen, 2006). As you read each one, apply it to scholarly writing.

1. **Attentional mindset.** In order to attain higher levels of proficiency with a task, the mind must pay fixed attention rather than being allowed to wander. What practical steps can you take to maintain your focus during writing sessions?
2. **Low to moderate stress.** The ideal mental state for learning has been described as "relaxed alertness". What changes can you make in when, where, and how you write that will help to reduce stress?

Table 3.4 Making your article irresistible to the editor**Define your terminology**

When presenting a logical argument, the first step is to clarify terminology. Assume that there could be different understandings, even of words that are in wide use. Do not use Webster's; use authoritative definitions from specialists in the field

Identify your thesis

No thesis, no article. In an article for publication, your purpose is to present a well-reasoned argument. Every writer approaches a topic from some point of view and has a "take" on the issue. It is not biased to acknowledge this; it is implied anyway. However, it is important to briefly mention opposing views as a way of demonstrating that you have considered them

Do not waste words

Editors call it their "page budget" for a reason—it is spent, just like money. Allowing authors to ramble on reduces the total number of articles or chapters that can be published and the variety of topics that can be treated in a journal or book. Most journal articles are no more than 25 double-spaced, 12 point print pages and that *includes* all references, tables, figures, diagrams, etc. This would be about 6–8 pages typeset as double columns of print

Begin with abundance

Even though concise articles are preferred, this does not mean that you write exactly 25 pages from the start. Rather, you begin with more text than you'll eventually publish and, like a large stockpot of soup, "cook it down" to its very essence. Numerous rewrites are the way to "thicken" your article and make it rich with ideas

Pre-review the work

Ask three knowledgeable, tough, and helpful colleagues to read your manuscript before you submit it for anonymous peer review. Analyze/synthesize their comments and revise accordingly

Draw upon experience to include examples

Publishable pieces do not only tell, they also show. It is difficult to read something that speaks only in general terms. We need specifics to connect with information. Examples in manuscripts should be: your own (rather than borrowed from someone else), powerful, and concise. Even a quantitative research article can benefit from an example that shows the people behind the statistics

Review beyond search engine results

Anyone can perform an online search using the obvious key words. Serious scholars delve into the literature in related fields and review books as well as online resources. Do not rely heavily on textbooks; they are considered to be secondary sources because they are someone else's interpretation of theory and research. To make your review even more interesting, take off your disciplinary blinders and search the topic in other, related fields

Synthesize the literature

Anyone can summarize, study by study; this is (bad) dissertation style. You need to organize the research *into themes or strands* rather than splice others' ideas together. In an article for publication, list only those references that were cited in text, not everything that you read

Produce a tightly organized piece

New academic authors are accustomed to writing papers for classes; these assignments rarely have an introduction or conclusion that is suitable for a publishable article. They also tend to be rather loosely organized, do not use headings, and do not include visual material (i.e., charts, tables, graphs, diagrams). Instead of reverting to the style of a class paper, replicate what you see when you study the format of what has been published in a journal or book

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Table 3.4 (continued)**Edit line by line**

“Each sentence should lead to the next and grow out of the last sentence of the previous paragraph” (Zinsser, 2001, p. 267). Too many short sentences in a row feel like machine gun fire while too many long sentences in a row cause readers’ attention to wane. Vary sentence length. Vary sentence patterns as well. For example, don’t begin several sentences with the same word or use the same structure. Be certain that every sentence is a complete thought. Try reading your work out loud to hear the cadence and flow

Use specific headings

Unless it is a quantitative research article with the customary headings (see Chap. 7), write headings that are specific to your topic. Avoid headings that are too general (e.g., History) and make them signposts for the building blocks of your argument. Not only do headings assist while you are writing and trying to categorize your ideas, they also notify readers of a change in direction. Use headings while writing to help you cluster your ideas when writing and then go back to revise them so that they are consistent in structure—for instance, make each heading begin with an *-ing* verb

3. **Coherent, meaningful tasks.** Optimizing the learning requires that the task be neither too easy (boredom sets in) or too difficult (frustration occurs) (Cszikzentmihalyi, 2008). How can you structure writing to focus on goals at the right level of difficulty so that you will commit to the task?
4. **Massed practice and repetition of the task.** Acquiring proficiency with a complex task typically requires a 30–90 min per day commitment three to five times per week (Jensen, 2006). How can you implement this with writing?
5. **Learner-controlled feedback.** Negative feedback (e.g., a rejection letter) can cause learners to become irritated and distressed. This tends to reduce motivation and persistence (Jensen, 2006). What strategies have you learned from this book that will give you more control over feedback?
6. **Overnight rest between learning sessions.** It appears that “learning is consolidated, organized, and distributed to various areas of the brain for long-term storage” as we sleep (Jensen, 2006, p. 73). How can you take advantage of this “sleep on it” phenomenon as an author?

Online Tool Refer to Caine’s Brain/Mind Principles of Natural Learning at <http://www.cainelearning.com/brain-mind-principles/> as a resource for improving writing.

Conclusion

When academic authors first begin attempting to publish their work, much of it may be rejected, not because it is irredeemably flawed but because they are uninformed or misinformed about the process of writing for scholarly publication. A prolific and widely published author once joked that, during his first 3 years as a university faculty member, it would have been possible to cover the walls of his office with rejection letters from publishers. After decades of reading, reviewing, writing, and editing, the outcomes are much better and he now jokes that he is “overbooked,” meaning that he has multiple book contracts at any given time. Knowing more about publishing will not make writing for publication easy, guarantee that work is always accepted, or even ensure that everything published is of consistent quality. It is, however, a way to increase chances for success as well as develop a more positive outlook on your responsibility to contribute to your field through published scholarly writing.